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3. CONSERVATION REFUGEES: THE HUNDRED-YEAR CONFLICT BETWEEN GLOBAL CONSERVATION AND NATIVE PEOPLES by Mark Dowie. Published by Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Massachusetts, USA, 2009. 339 pp. Size: 23.5 cm x 15.5 cm. Price not mentioned. Hardback.

This is a remarkable, thought-provoking and controversial book from an investigative journalist, well-known for his strong views on the rights of local communities. I must say that this book should be read by all leading conservationists, human rights activists, conservation NGOs, decision makers and anyone who is interested in the long-term security of wildlife and wild places. It is now recognized all over the world that without involving local communities and using their traditional knowledge and wisdom, we cannot save our protected areas, and particularly large wide-ranging landscape species. As modern human beings are the major problem for PAs and species conservation, we cannot have a solution without involving them.

Like many other modern concepts (and problems), the idea of establishing large protected areas was started in the USA by the creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872. Since then, more than one hundred thousand PAs have been established in the world. While half of them were established in remote, uninhabited, or thinly inhabited areas, the rest had indigenous people living or regularly using them for hundreds of years. In the northern countries, local communities or inhabitants were incorporated into the PAs, but in less developed countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, local communities were displaced in the interest of conservation. Now they are fighting back, leading to huge conflicts. Sadly, the worst sufferers in these people-PA conflicts are the species or ecosystems for which these PAs were established in the first place. This is particularly acute where local people do not benefit from PAs. With no political support to wildlife conservation, particularly in democracies, and increasing demands of people and industries, the future of the present concept of PAs looks bleak.

The book is divided in 19 major chapters, covering examples of PA-tribal conflicts from all over the world. The language is simple, free of jargon, except for the large number of abbreviations dotted all over the book. The author is particularly harsh on large international conservation

organizations or BINGOs (Big International NGOs) such as WWF, IUCN, Conservation International, Wildlife Conservation Society and TNC. The text in many places shows his prejudice rather than an objective assessment. We have to accept that BINGOs and national and regional conservation organizations have played a major role in arresting the decline of many threatened species. Admittedly, we could have achieved many more conservation successes by greater involvement and benefit to indigenous communities, but priorities are now changing. People's involvement in conservation is now in the mandate of all major dynamic NGOs such as BirdLife International, whose motive is "For Birds, For People".

The journalistic streak of the author is seen throughout the book. In many places, the language and tone is of an activist pamphleteer, not an unbiased serious writer. Although Mark Dowie extensively quotes writer-thinkers like Ramachandran Guha and Ashish Kothari, particularly on Indian issues, many quotes have been taken out of context to fit his views. He is also wrong in many places. I quote only Indian cases. For instance, it is wrong to say that "about eight thousand tribal people and low-caste farmers living in the Kuno area ... were summarily uprooted from the rich farmlands ... for a pride of six imported Asiatic lions." I have been to Kuno-Palpur many times in the 1980s. First of all, the people "uprooted" were not all tribal and low caste, secondly they were not cultivating "rich farmland". Most of them were living in extreme poverty in remote villages, with very little cultivable land, with no facilities like potable water, electricity, proper schools and hospitals. The roads were so bad that once I had to return halfway, without even reaching Palpur. It is also wrong to sensationalise that "for a pride of six imported Asiatic lions", 8,000 poor "tribal people" were uprooted. Reintroduction of the Asiatic Lion into Kuno-Palpur was a well-thought out scheme, and the "tribal people" were given good compensation, cultivable land and basic facilities that they did not have in their remote forest villages. Kuno-Palpur is one good example of properly planned

relocation and rehabilitation where now the villagers have good cultivated land, accessible roads, schools, hospitals and modern connectivity. Unfortunately, the "six imported Asiatic lions" have not reached Kuno-Palpur Sanctuary due to petty politics in Gujarat, but that is a different story.

The book frequently glorifies the "sustainable lifestyle of tribal and indigenous communities". I wish this were true, even partially. Increase in human population, decrease of forest cover and demands of market forces have upturned these so-called sustainable lifestyles. What was sustainable a hundred years ago, with a small tribal community with thousands of square kilometres of forest/grassland around them to exploit, is no more sustainable. If all tribals really live sustainably, why do we have barren hillsides for miles and miles in the tribal districts of western Madhya Pradesh or the Khandesh area of Maharashtra? Why is it that practically no large ungulate survives in the tribal districts of northern Gujarat? Isn't sustainable hunting beneficial for tribals so they can hunt throughout their life and for

generations without exterminating wildlife? Hunting is so intense and unsustainable that even sighting a squirrel is difficult in some of these tribal inhabited areas in Gujarat. If tribal wisdom teaches us to live sustainably, then why have the tribals of Nicobar started using snares to catch egg-laying Nicobar Megapode, and shoot birds by airguns. Why can't they harvest a few eggs from the Megapode nest mounds and spare the adult birds so they can lay more eggs. Even in our backyard poultry, we do not kill egg-laying birds.

Admittedly, the book gives a one-sided view and glorifies the role of tribal communities and their so-called sustainable lifestyle. Nonetheless, it is an interesting book and should be read by all those who are interested in wildlife conservation. We may not agree with every viewpoint of Mark Dowie, but we cannot afford to ignore him either. That is why I say, it is a remarkable book because it forces us to re-think our conservation paradigm.

■ ASAD R. RAHMANI

4. THE STORY OF ASIA'S ELEPHANTS by Raman Sukumar. Published by The Marg Foundation, 2011. 339 pp. Size: 18.7 cm x 22.5 cm. Price: Rs. 3,500/-. Hardback.

The Asian Elephant is again at the crossroads of its survival struggle against man. Of the three species of the elephant family that inhabited the earth, only two remain: the Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) and African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*). The tale of the extinction of the mammoth, brought about by climate change and aided by persecution by man, is an ominous sign on what could befall the two extant species if elephant habitats continue to be destroyed and the animals persecuted. Of the two extant species, the situation of the Asian Elephant is more at risk as its populations are now confined to the few remaining forests, and even these last tracts are facing huge pressures due to the increasing human population.

Once widely spread from the Euphrates through the Indian subcontinent, Indo-China, southern China and SE Asia, the Asian Elephant now occurs in pockets in some of its former ranges numbering around 40 to 50 thousand animals, with more than 50% of the population in India. Elephant has always fascinated humankind and no other wild animal has had such a close love-hate relationship with man. Hinduism venerated it to the status of a god (Lord Ganesha) – one reason why there are fairly still so many elephants left in India. Used for war, for carrying deities and rajas, in forestry operations, to entertain in circuses, for begging and also hunted for ivory, their association with humans has a long history.

Dr. Raman Sukumar is India's most well-known elephant biologist and an authority on the Asian Elephant

worldwide. A Professor at the Centre for Ecological Studies, Indian Institute of Science, he has his own set-up, the Asian Nature Conservation Foundation, which has undertaken a number of significant projects on elephants and other wildlife. Dr. Sukumar has three 'bestsellers' on elephants to his credit. The first, *THE ASIAN ELEPHANT: ECOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT* (1989), is a scientific treatise of the species based largely on his doctoral work in southern India (the Biligirirangans) investigating its ecology and interaction with man. This was followed by *ELEPHANT DAYS AND NIGHTS* (1994), a popular account of his initiation into elephant studies and his doctoral work. This publication, besides throwing light on his work and findings on the Asian Elephant makes delightful reading, revealing Dr. Sukumar's talent as a gifted writer. The third, *THE LIVING ELEPHANTS: EVOLUTIONARY ECOLOGY, BEHAVIOUR AND CONSERVATION*, covered both the Asian and African elephants, dealing with their evolution, behaviour, ecology, their interactions with humans, and their conservation and management. This was regarded as his *magnum opus* till date.

The new publication, a highly illustrated book, primarily provides a historical account of the Asian Elephant, tracing its association with man, and impacts/influences on the culture, religion, wars and lifestyles of people in India and in the rest of its distributional range. This is no doubt another significant publication on the Asian Elephant by Dr. Sukumar. Even from a casual perusal of the publication, one quickly realizes it is a high quality publication – from